Strategic Alignment vs. Opportunity Hopping – Disruptive Times Require a Firm Strategy

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ABSTRACT: In a time with many unexpected sudden events—disruptive times—it is more important than ever for executives not to lose sight of their strategy and to implement the corporate strategy according to plan via systematic *Strategic Alignment*. Oftentimes, managers only survived the Covid-19 pandemic through sheer pragmatism and tactical behavior. Their strategy took a back seat, and strategic considerations were not taken into account due to a lack of time or resources. The business management literature is more concerned with developing new strategies than either the implementation or the day-to-day practice of strategic management. In the latter, corporate strategy usually plays no role and appears to many as a too remote an instrument to guide operational work. *Strategic Alignment* binds all corporate actions to an overarching strategic plan. *Strategic Alignment* defines the framework for decisions and is a procedure for making downstream decisions consistently and in a sustainable form. In times of crises and disruptive developments, the well thought-out corporate strategy is seen as a hindrance to making money, where an initial strategic alignment may quickly become a misalignment. Instead, short-term opportunities and promising profit opportunities are sought and exploited, even if they contradict the correctly held strategy. It then becomes 'opportunity hopping', where quick profit or sheer survival become the motives for acting and may also result in less attention being paid to the legality of the business. The recent qualitative study presented in this paper explores the status quo in strategy implementation

and, in particular, Strategic Alignment. The method of Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) was used to analyze the current state of companies until theoretical saturation is reached. The iterative cycles of the research started in Germany but, at a later date, interview partners in Switzerland, France and the USA were integrated into the study.

Introduction

In the implementation of the corporate strategy, deviations or simply contradictory actions occur over time. *Strategic Alignment* describes whether the organization and its employees are moving along the strategic path, i.e., whether there is a positive alignment, or whether the orientation to the strategy has been lost, i.e., whether there is a misalignment.

In the currently ongoing study using a qualitative research methodology, the current state of *Strategic Alignment* is surveyed and discussed. The research is deliberately broad in scope, as the environment for strategy implementation has fundamentally changed since the pandemic and now with the war in Ukraine. Using Grounded Theory, the topic will be addressed in cyclical research loops and will continue to deepen. The openness of this research methodology is an advantage in a constantly changing environment. The goal of Grounded Theory is always to derive a theory that is valid either for the current situation or, ideally, beyond it.

The research synopsis for this study was prepared back in 2019, well before the disruptive events of the pandemic and events like the Ukraine war with their immediate impact on the economy in Europe. With Grounded Theory, the research design is determined at the outset, but can still be adjusted as things develop. The focus of the research is to conduct qualitative interviews, usually lasting just under two hours. The interviews are transcribed, coded and then further analyzed. As is customary with Grounded Theory, a literature review is then conducted on the results of the interviews. An initial finding from the interviews is that a corporate strategy must be in place (like a corporate credo), but that its practical importance for day-to-day business is relatively low. The creation is described as a

compulsory exercise and the associated strategy process is also perceived as time-consuming work—that it is not for everyone—but such statements were also made by top executives.

In Grounded Theory, usually no working question is required; more importantly, the *Domain of Interest* (DI) is used as the basis for research design and the work in the research (Döring et al. 2015, 26–27). The DI is used to understand how strategy implementation and strategic alignment are currently taking place in companies, what the drivers and motivations are, and also which methods and procedures are used in this context. A key competitive advantage in global competition is the speed with which new strategies are implemented or, as the interview partners put it, "how the strategy is put on the road."

The word *strategy* has become a term of everyday language: when someone wants to give some weight to an idea, it becomes a strategic idea. Most often, this is also used to testify to its special lasting quality. A simple plan thus quickly becomes a strategic plan—even if, strictly speaking, it is not. To distinguish this, it is better to speak of political, military or economic strategy. For companies, it is a matter of corporate strategy (Freedman 2015, 460–461).

Research on corporate and business strategy started in the 1960s with Igor Ansoff, considered to be the founder of scientific 'strategic management' (Freedman 2015, 500–501). Prior to this, the historian Chandler had used the corporate history of General Motors as a case study for his book "Strategy and Structures" (Chandler 1962 (1975 printing)). He used his connections to the Du Pont family to make further observations and he later became one of the first influential consultants for McKinsey (Freedman 2015, 497). Of course, entrepreneurs like Rockefeller (Chernow 2000, 129-131), for example, had a strategy, just not a strategy in the formal and scientific sense that has emerged over the last 50 years. Following Ansoff, strategic thinking was particularly in vogue for large enterprises over the following two decades. After the year 2000, strategic thinking began to be more influenced by traditional strategic thinking that had originated from politics and the military, with the term 'business as war' becoming especially popular (Freedman 2015). Accordingly, these new interpretations brought the classical works of Clausewitz and his teacher Scharnhorst back into focus (Paret 2014, 19–20, 81). Clausewitz later expanded on Scharnhorst's

practical experiences and shaped them into theories on an abstract level, especially in his work "On War" (Hornung 1997, 53).

In business administration, strategy is assigned to corporate planning and the area of responsibility of top management. *Strategic Alignment* concerns the alignment of entrepreneurial action with the adopted strategy. The process of strategic planning anticipates different scenarios and attempts to describe a path for them that is probable and can also be seen as feasible in the eyes of the executives. Lack of alignment is repeatedly criticized by scientists and managers, and is hence described as a latent problem. Trevor asks "How aligned is your organization?" and provides a definition of alignment: Alignment means that the organization's strategies, capabilities, resources and management systems are arranged to support the enterprise purpose (Trevor 2019, 1). As a result, a positive alignment is described, but no explanation is offered as to which methods or tools can be used to achieve this (Trevor 2019, 6).

A good strategy should be convincing in itself and thus create acceptance for its implementation. The predominance of strategic action versus the collection of opportunities to make money should be obvious to everyone. Nevertheless, even in large companies, there are always phases where there is no determinable strategy, or where there is a lack of alignment even when a good strategy is in place. The question which therefore arises for the researcher and also for the manager is: Why do this when you actually want to act strategically?

Research Design based on Grounded Theory

The "disruptive environment" and its influence on corporate strategy was not a topic in the preparation of this research exposé. The global health crisis was not foreseeable when planning the research work, much less the global political and economic upheavals. For decades, until the onset of the pandemic, a relatively stable environment existed for business in which sudden changes in strategy were not necessary for most industries. The newly emerging influences have not only made research more difficult, but have also devalued some of the previously valid literature.

Grounded Theory is a human cognitive practice following Kant and Popper (Kruse 2015, 96). The special methodological language legitimizes

Grounded Theory for qualitative research (Kruse 2015, 95). The particular benefit of Grounded Theory is an established procedure with its own terminology that can be adapted by researchers to the individual research design. Understandably, the philosophical foundations do not offer pragmatic tools or a research process.
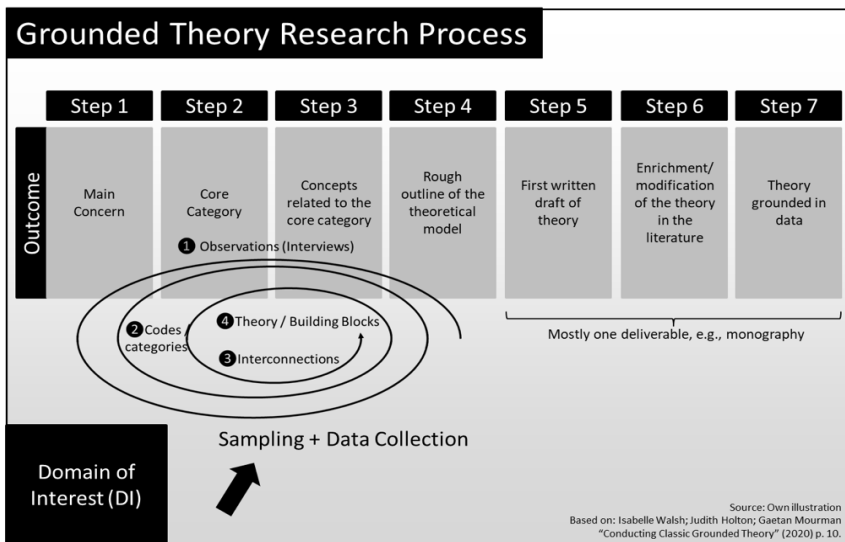

Figure 1: Research Process according to the Grounded Theory Methodology

The domain of interest is the thematic delimitation and also the central leitmotif for the entire research work (Figure 1). The less research exists in a field, the wider the domain of interest should be defined. Steps 1 to 4 describe the research process, which is largely determined by Grounded Theory. Step 5 is where the findings from the qualitative research are condensed and summarized. Then, Step 6 enriches the research findings with existing literature. Step 7 should lead to a theory or a theoretical approach, if the research results allow this (Walsh et al. 2020, 10).

Interviews were conducted and coded throughout 2021 and 2022. Memos in the form of researcher's notes documented the observations and findings. The Core Category and the related concepts emerged from the data, and the main relationships and aspects became clear. Currently, the research finds itself at Step 3 of the process, with saturation not yet having been reached. Further interviews will be scheduled, as there is still a demand

for new and fresh data. Of course, in a stable situation as was the case before the pandemic, saturation would probably have been reached sooner.
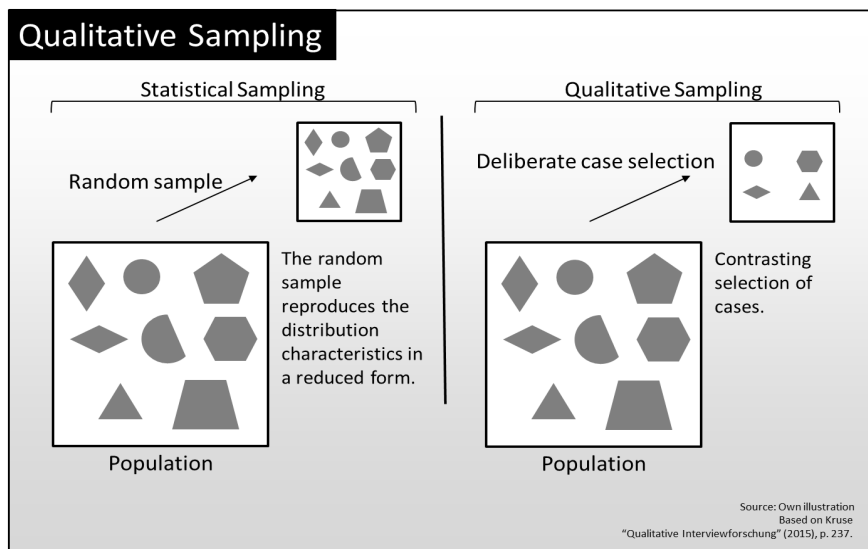

Figure 2: Qualitative versus Statistical Sampling

In quantitative case selection, the sample must be representative (Figure 2). In other words, the sample must have the same structural characteristics as the population. For qualitative sampling, two methods are used:

1. Contrastive sampling strategy with the aim of selecting maximum structural variants or
2. Homogeneous sampling where the same patterns are selected (Kruse 2015, 237).

In this study, the challenge is to obtain contrasting statements that are as far apart as possible, i.e., the interviewees should bring as many different aspects of strategic alignment into the research process as possible.

The adaptability to different research situations is a further benefit to the different versions of Grounded Theory. The integration of different data sources is the central aspect of the mixed-method Grounded Theory (MM-GT) (Creamer 2021, XVII). The second path of Grounded Theory, which may help in this research effort, is *reflexive* Grounded Theory (R/GT) which accepts and integrates the fact that the researcher is not a neutral person

with full scientific objectivity (Breuer et al. 2019, 10). This shows the range from the formal or classical Grounded Theory to the latest developments in this field. In this research project, classical Grounded Theory is applied and customized to the needs of the subject and specific situation.
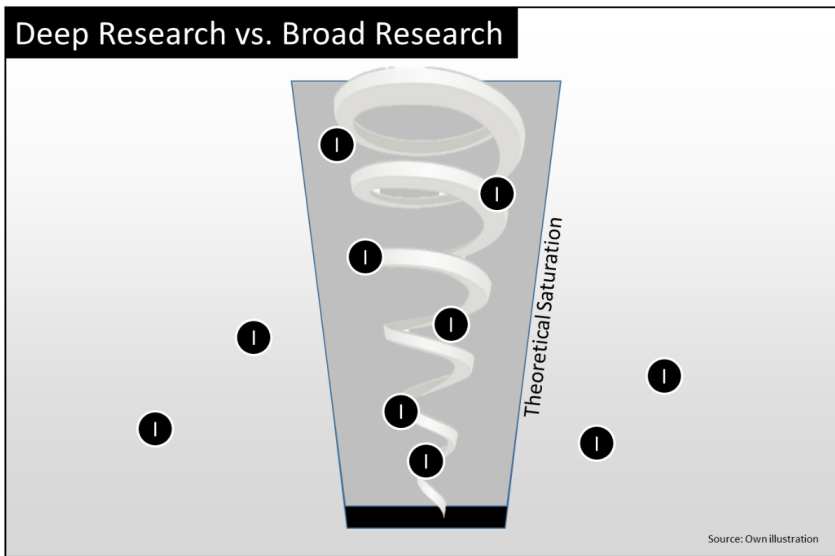

Figure 3: Research Dimensions

The goal in Grounded Theory is to reach theoretical saturation in research work: that is, a state in which no more new findings are to be expected (Figure 3). This is, of course, an ideal picture, because every interview still brings new aspects or new formulations for already known and described aspects. The researcher must therefore decide for himself when he wants to conclude the data set—a decision that will always be open to third party criticism in retrospect. If the "research borehole" is very deep, theoretical saturation can be reached relatively quickly because the statements of interview partners from identical functions and roles will naturally be similar. After all, many topics in management are subject to a trend or fashion, so that certain preferences will emerge. In almost all industries, there is an exchange at the most diverse levels via specialist conferences or working groups. As a result, many points of view and convictions converge. Research with such depth can, however be criticized that only one perspective is considered and that the environment is left outside of the consideration.

The research originally envisaged personal interviews at the respective interviewee's workplace. This allows a personal relationship of trust to be established and there is still sufficient time for side conversations and small talk, which ultimately helps to enrich the content of the research and improve its quality. Due to the lockdown and contact restrictions, only interviews via video conferencing were possible for the research. A detailed preliminary telephone conversation was held to discuss the topic of *Strategic Alignment* and what contribution the interviewee could make to the research. A questionnaire was also designed for the preliminary phase to collect standardized facts from the interviewee. The questionnaire was developed from a professional perspective, and it was known that not every interview partner would be able to answer all questions. There is a certain reluctance among top executives to use standardized procedures, which usually do not fit the individual case. In order not to create any resistance among the interview partners, this questionnaire was therefore made available in the preliminary interview as an offer to better understand the subject. The aim of the preliminary interview was not to remove the interviewee but to put him in a positive mood for the actual interview and to motivate him to participate.
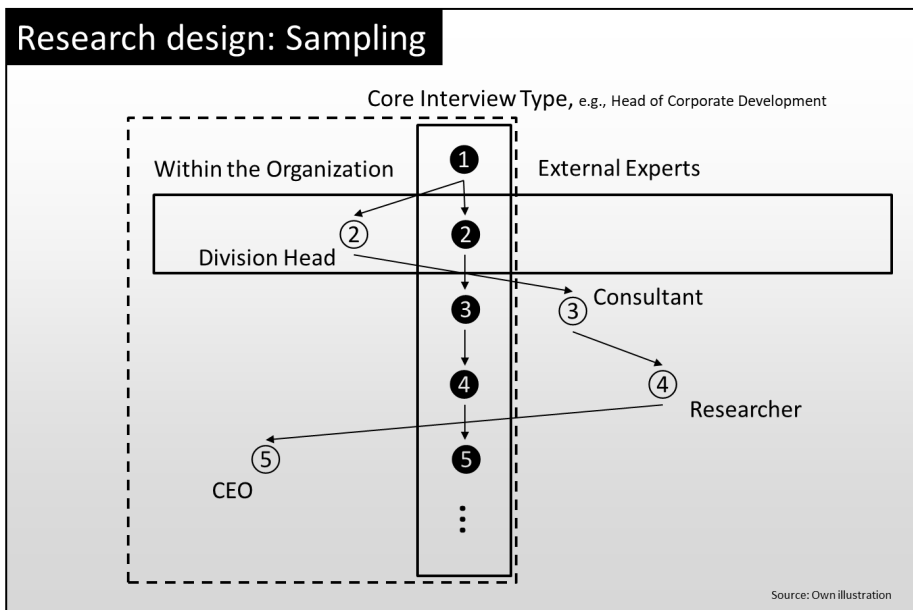

Figure 4: Selection of Sources for Interviews

The key question in selecting sources and interviewees is whether a particular group of people or functions from different organizations should be interviewed, or whether different people can make a greater substantive contribution (Figure 4): Linear survey versus lateral survey. For example, the interview partners designated with ❶ are heads of strategy departments. In the course of the interviews, the same functions from different companies are repeatedly interviewed here. If new insights are to be expected, additional in-depth knowledge can be collected for the research. The disadvantage is that these people often have very similar backgrounds and, due to personnel changes, their views will also be very similar. The broader survey is characterized by ②. Here, both internal and external experts are included in the qualitative data collection. The advantage is that different roles and functions are already included in the survey and thus correspondingly diverse perspectives on the topic find their way into the research.

Further work on the transcribed interview concerns coding using the standard software MAXQDA. In addition to the interview texts, a fieldnote was created for each interview. Contents from the preliminary interview or from other telephone calls with the interview partner are documented here. Supplementary information received by e-mail, for example, is also documented here. Some interviewees are themselves technical book authors and provided even more supplementary content to the interview or references to their own publications, which were also incorporated into the research via the fieldnotes.

Already since the beginnings of Grounded Theory, Glaser postulated *"All is data"* as early as 1978. He stated this principle in detail in later publications and made it clear that the interview should be enriched with transcription (Glaser 2007). This means that, in addition to the interviews, observations, existing material from the interviewee and also other sources should be taken into account in order to ensure qualitatively rich research. To give an example: If the interviewee talks about a software solution for *Strategic Alignment*, it is necessary to be aware of the corresponding screen shots or the technical concept of this application. The pure interview would remain far too superficial here. In terms of disruptive developments, a source could also be a suitable scenario from a movie, as is the case with the current pandemic with *Contagion* (Soderbergh 2011).

Research Phase

Initial findings address the importance of commitment to strategy due to legal requirements and the lack of strategy implementation despite an implemented strategy process.

Supervisory law for financial service providers calls for consistent strategy commitment

The interviewees from the financial industry emphasized the legal framework created for the business strategy and also for the risk strategy. This involves an integrated understanding of the strategy documents available in the company. The content of these must be coordinated and enable effective management of the company. Prior to the financial crisis in 2008, there were no clearly formulated requirements from the legislator that could then be checked for compliance by BaFin (the banking and insurance supervisory authority in Germany). For insurance companies, these legal requirements have existed since an amendment to the German Insurance Supervision Act (VAG). However, the institutions have been given extensive scope in their respective organizations to create customized organizational solutions (Schmude 2008, 1556).
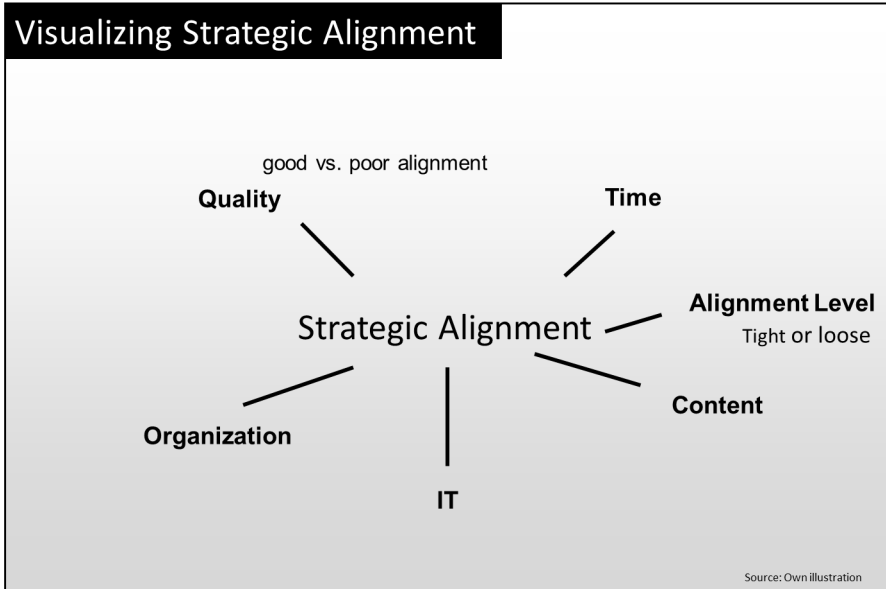

Figure 5: Aspects of Strategic Alignment

Coding concerns combining the raw material, for example, the transcriptions of interviews, into data segments and naming them. Another term for coding is indexing or tagging, in the meaning of identifying and labeling (Equit and Hohage 2016). Coding the raw data is an essential step in the scientist's work. The term code can also be paraphrased as category. The result of the coding is a system of codes and subcodes.

In the literature analysis, by using the software Citavi, it is possible to assign categories and subcategories for the literature sources. This has already been done with more than 470 sources currently and will be continuously expanded. Current references to the Covid-19 pandemic or the ongoing war in Ukraine with its effects on all sectors of the economy have understandably not yet been scientifically prepared. Thus, only current reporting in newspapers, magazines and increasingly also television can be resorted to. To dispense with this source would be to ignore or negate the current situation. This would be a clear bias that must be avoided.
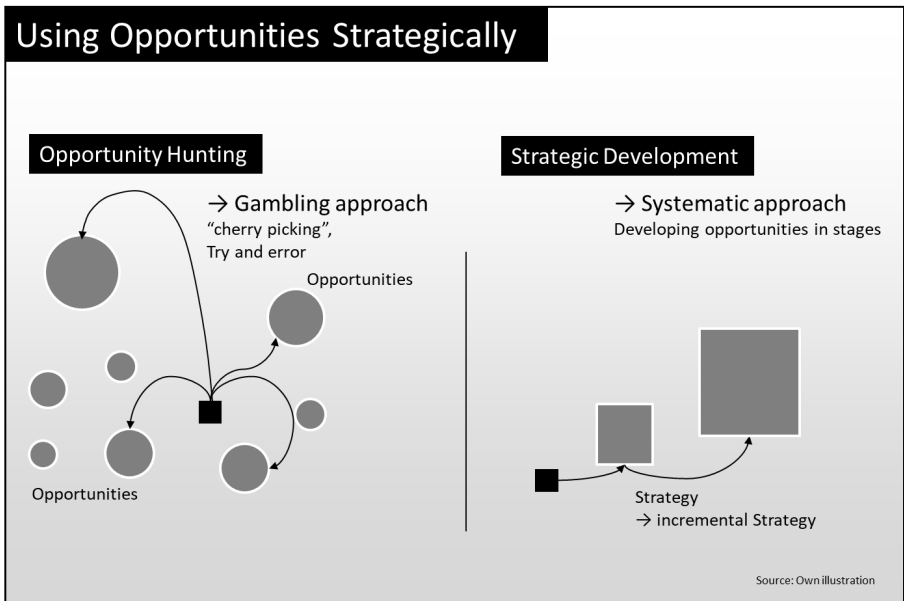

Figure 6: Strategic Development versus Opportunity Hopping

It is not the case in very company that strategic thinking determines action. Particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), business

opportunities are sought that are promising in terms of profits (Figure 6). Especially in the pandemic, this was repeatedly observed in the initial shortage of disinfectants and medical masks. A profit, or at least the prospect of one, becomes the driver for entrepreneurial action. It is a search for business opportunities that are exploited in the short term but which are abandoned just as quickly again. Even large companies are not free from this way of doing business, but are less likely to do this because of their obligation to justify and be accountable. As to the question, what is the opposite of strategic actions, this demarcation was developed. Growth here is accomplished in spontaneous leaps rather than a coordinated systematic approach. Strategy, on the other hand, recognizes the opportunities and develops the company accordingly in stages, following an internal logic.

Strategic Alignment

The approach of Balanced Scorecards (BSC) and Strategy Maps was initiated by Kaplan and Norton. It is a tool for strategy implementation and, more precisely, it is a monitoring tool with metrics to show whether the implementation of the strategy is in line with the adopted strategy. This monitoring function is assigned to the *Office of Strategic Management (OSM)*. The alignment is intended to create synergies. According to this, alignment is a management process that is run through cyclically and basically chooses the top-down view which, however, can lead to distortions in the implementation. Accordingly, realignment represents a readjustment and taking a new direction (Kaplan and Norton 2014, 14–16). The duties of the Executive Board and the Supervisory Board to monitor the strategy are particularly emphasized and their recognizable failures in the past are reprimanded (Kaplan and Norton 2014, 198–199).

The five-element strategy diamond developed by Hambrick and Fredrickson in 2001 is often associated with alignment, but according to the authors it is a framework for analyzing strategy. Since everything is now called strategy, there is some confusion about what really is strategy and what is not. The inflationary use of the word strategy undermines its value and credibility. The elements of the strategy according to the diamond framework are: *Arenas (= markets), Vehicles, Differentiators, Staging* and overall the *Economic Logic* (that which generates profits). These elements, grouped in a diamond, form

the strategy diamond (Hambrick and Fredrickson 2001, 51), whereby the shape of the diamond is an arbitrarily chosen shape and does not carry any information of its own. The designation as a diamond is a pure artifice for better marketing. Developed from teaching, this model has spread rapidly in textbooks on strategy, for example, "Strategic Management: A Dynamic Perspective" by Carpenter and Sanders is completely structured according to this framework. (Carpenter and Sanders 2009, 14–17). Other authors emphasize the *Staging* element: Implementation speed and sequence is often not adequately discussed and considered, which can lead to a flawed strategy (Rawitzer and Hefti 2018).
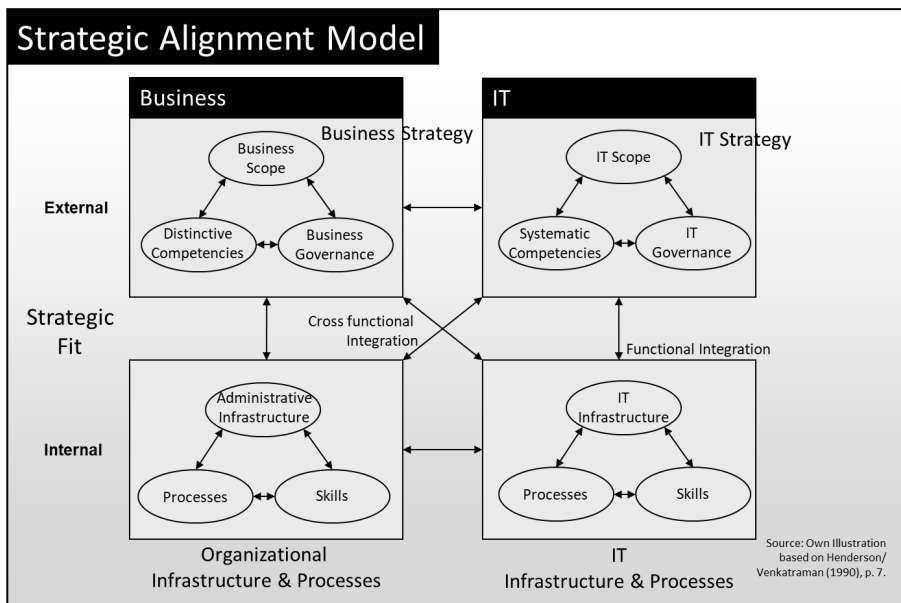

Figure 7: IT-Alignment Model according to Henderson

The *Strategic Alignment* of IT with the business side of the organization was first recognized by Henderson and Venkatraman in 1990 (Figure 7), their research being directly funded by the computer industry—specifically, IBM. The core aspect here is to bring the organization in line with all its existing human resources and processes with the latest computer technology (Henderson and Venkatraman 1990, 7–9). The IT perspective dominates this alignment model. The integration of IT Strategy and Business Strategy

is the core element, viewed from either an internal or external perspective. In this model, then, IT and business strategies stand side by side as equally important. Needs of the market, customers or competitors are not addressed within the model. As the overall driver of strategy, the model places technology at the forefront and ignores management and human aspects. Indeed, strategy history is full of examples supporting the notion that technology enables new strategies.

For the development and implementation of strategies, the latest technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) are recognized as being central. A meta-study on the importance of AI for the overarching strategy in China (Grand Strategy) shows that AI is seen as a resource for future development. It is not only about domestic surveillance, but rather the possibility to take a leading role in geostrategic 'intelligentized warfare'. Equally, it is not about state control or the work of the intelligence services, but the integration of political, military, diplomatic and economic interests (Leo S.F. Lin 2021, 51–53). Unlike Western democracies, corporate strategy in China is closely intertwined with political vision, and political and military strategy. Alignment with strategy can be managed via AI and behavior contrary to strategy can also be quickly detected and sanctioned.
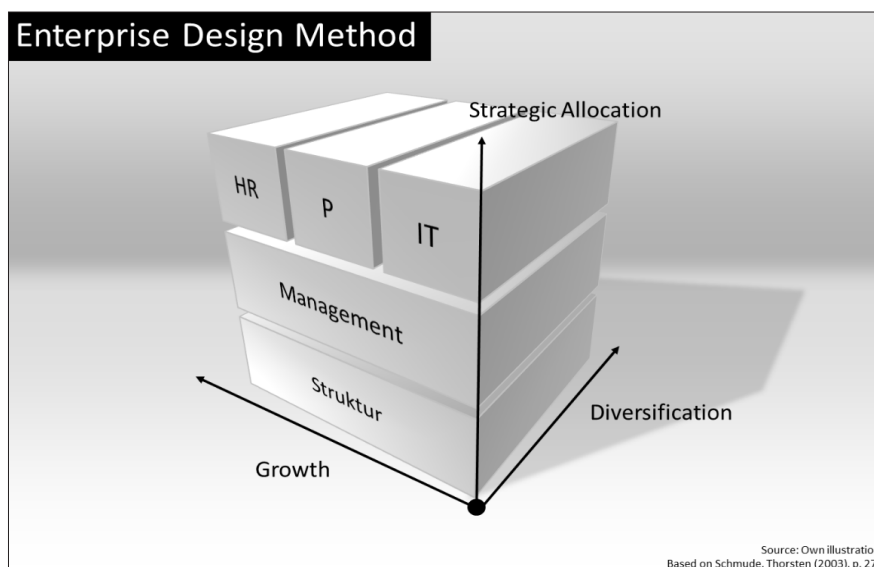

Figure 8. Strategic Building Blocks

The Enterprise Design cube groups the topics of strategic business design according to an internal logic and in such a way that important interdependencies are easily recognized. The depth dimension of the cube is formed by the entities, for example organizational units or legal entities.

Based on the consulting work, the *Enterprise Design Model* (ED Model) was developed for the strategic planning and its implementation. The method is explained on the basis of practical reports, such as the reorganization of a large bank branch and a spin-off from an automobile manufacturer. In international projects, the communicability of planning contents plays a central role, as well as that the essential contents can be recognized at a glance, prima vista (Schmude 2003, 17–21).

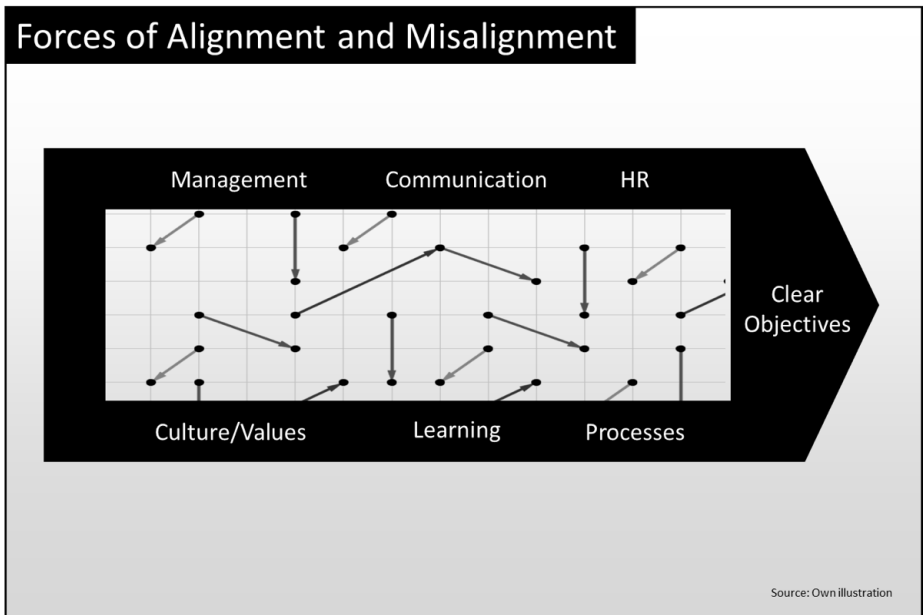Figure 9: Driver and Forces of Strategic Alignment

The forces that lead to good alignment or to bad alignment, i.e., misalignment, form the starting point for a deeper understanding of *Strategic Alignment* (Figure 9). The diagram shows the framework in which alignment takes place. The individual forces can each affect strategy implementation. When these drivers are identified and understood, targeted influence can be

considered via optimization and management of these forces. The direction is set by the goals, which is why clearly formulated and understandable targets are an absolute prerequisite for alignment. The remaining six forces are: Management or control, communication, human resources (employees), culture and values, learning and knowledge transfer, and the organization of work referred to here as business processes. To find a linguistic image for alignment, one would have to compare it to a form of natural bonding, as is the case with magnetism. Invisible forces bring everyone and everything together to fulfill the strategy.

Voluntary versus Forced Alignment: Alignment of the individual or even the entire organization can be voluntary or forced. A voluntary alignment with the strategy is the ideal case, because here the actors involved know and understand the strategy and act and decide in line with its spirit. In the case of forced alignment, means of influence and management are used to ensure that the organization behaves in accordance with the strategy.

Visualizing Strategic Alignment

Planning Horizon — 2026 — 2025 — 2024 — 2023 — 2022

Strategic Roadmap

"Strategic Guard Rail"

A_2 A_1 A_3

Min. Max

Outside the defined strategic development range

Δ = Strategic Path

Status-quo/Current Strategic Position

Source: Own illustration
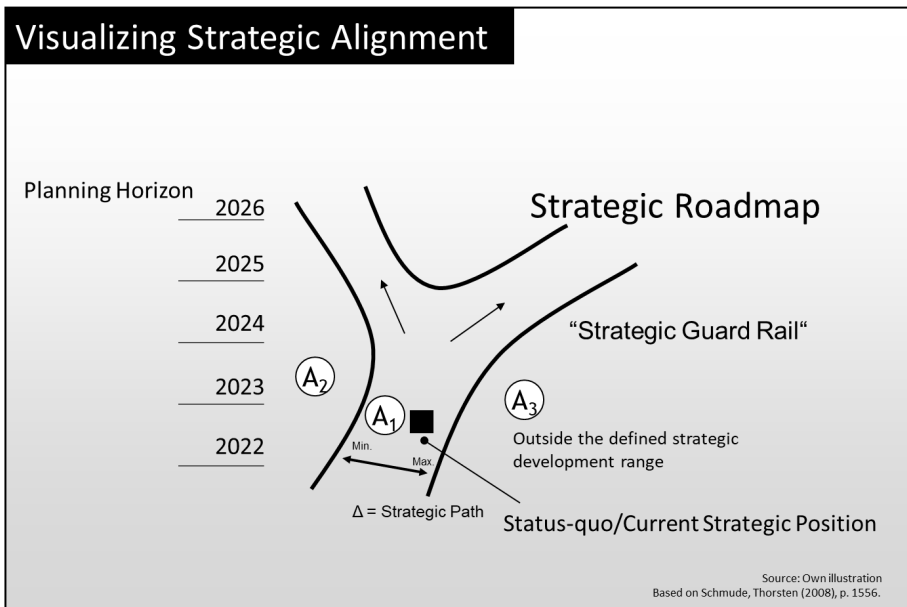Based on Schmude, Thorsten (2008), p. 1556.

Figure 10: The Strategic Path

A common way to visualize the strategy is strategic road mapping, showing a roadmap with the planned strategic initiatives and options.

Branches in the road can stand for milestones in the company's development, for example for central directional decisions, such as a merger, or a decision for a market segment or a specific product line. Such a strategic road map can be used in strategy development as well as for the communication of the strategy (Schmude 2008). Strategic guardrails provide guidance, but they do not offer absolute certainty. Everyone knows that guardrails along highways are regularly breached in the event of a serious traffic accident.

Moving along the strategic line is a paraphrase for *Strategic Alignment*. This metaphor is helpful because it shows that the strategy is understood as a development and not as a state (final state = that would be a goal) and the company itself determines how fast it moves and also how far it may move away from this strategic path. The term *Strategic Alignment* is not a common term in Germany, but is nevertheless understood by all managers. A very common phrase is "getting the strategy on the road", i.e., implementing it successfully.

Ethical Considerations regarding Strategic Research

Fundamental strategic decisions in companies today are increasingly based on scientific studies. GTM provides a new framework for qualitative research in the field of strategic planning and strategic corporate management.

The research design based on Grounded Theory used today is very broad and well characterized by the statement "All is data". Not only qualitative interviews that are transcribed and then, through a process of condensation and content processing (coding), become the building blocks of a theory of their own are allowed here, but essentially all sources, including the experiential knowledge of the researchers. The classification of the sources and the identification of subjective aspects and personal evaluations are therefore crucial in order to achieve the highest possible degree of scientific objectivity (Quinlan et al., 2019, 43-44).

Theoretical sampling is a core principle of GTM. This involves the selection of sources such as interview partners. There is no statistically determined number of interviews, for example, but the researcher determines when theoretical saturation has been reached in the specific research project and data collection is terminated. Openness in research is one of the special strengths of GTM and allows the researcher to develop new solutions born

of creativity. Ethical considerations are very important—especially with a very broad method and a free field for new solutions—because they provide a framework for one's own thinking and research.

However, greater freedom in research also leads to greater ethical moral responsibility on the part of the researcher (research ethics). The researcher's own reflection on all steps of the research process and particularly on the results therefore becomes an intrinsic topic. The researcher's own views and an interpretation of the content that comes too early can lead to a bias in the research results. Transparent documentation of all steps in the research work can help to avoid this bias, as can regular evaluation of intermediate results with a supervisor in the research institution (Döring et al. 2015, 123–124).

The research process in Grounded Theory requires constant attention from both the researcher and his team in an iterative approach. The theoretical saturation can hardly be determined at the beginning of the research, but rather emerges over the course of the work. When discussion-worthy results are available, they can be published and discussed with outside experts.

The research methodology according to Grounded Theory allows a research project to be reopened and continued at any time, for example if new findings are expected or the environment has changed. This openness in research design is particularly useful for studies that have a long-term research intention (longitudinal studies).

The ethical considerations relate not only to the research itself, but also to the environment under consideration. A properly constituted company is considered to be one which operates in compliance with the law. However, the reality is different: Organized crime (OC) continues to increase worldwide. According to the OECD, 3.6% of the global GDP (or USD 2.1 trillion) result from illegal activities (OECD 2022). In terms of individual companies, the current case of Wirecard is noteworthy—a listed financial services provider in Germany, which suddenly slipped from celebrated stock market stardom to insolvency because of fraudulent machinations by top management (Holtermann, 2019).

In terms of *Strategic Alignment,* this means that legal business concepts based on consensus and a largely voluntary approach have a much harder time because legal corporations are largely transparent and use soft factors to enforce control of their employees and businesses.

Conclusion

The domain of interest for research on strategic alignment is the implementation of corporate strategy and, in particular, the commitment to the strategy of individuals and entire organizations. The existence of a corporate strategy is essential for the top management in large companies and also SMEs, even if it is not acted upon conclusively later, i.e., it will only have been implemented in parts or not at all. Rarely is strategy implementation about the implementation of clear visions, instead, the emphasis is on a further development of a more or less successful business model. Pragmatism and opportunism are stronger than commitment to the strategy, which then leads to opportunity hopping, and where extraordinary short-term profit opportunities are assumed, the well-considered strategy is often disregarded—as are the risks associated with this opportunity hopping.

It therefore becomes clear that in many companies strategic planning is a compulsory exercise and that the result of this—the corporate strategy—is only implemented to a limited extent. There are cases in which it really is a pro forma strategy, and then the existing strategy documents have many gaps or can be interpreted in very different ways, and there is a lack of commitment to the strategy from management and employees. This can have different causes, such as a lack of understanding of the strategy or a lack of acceptance of, or commitment to, the formally adopted strategy. Especially in disruptive times, when no alternative scenarios have been thought through and planned out, strategic management quickly takes a back seat, and action is also taken contrary to strategy: Markets and customers outside the strategic focus are addressed, and products and services are developed that are off the strategic path.

The overarching influence of unexpected events must be given greater consideration: Wars and crises change people and, thus, society as a whole. Currently, we are in the third year of the pandemic Covid-19, and it has become a new normality to wear masks in public transport, for example. Many companies are now practicing home office for the time being, which has so far worked well for two years off the cuff without any real preparation.

In this report, statements can only be made on the basis of the qualitative interviews conducted and the evaluation of the associated material. A generalization is thus only possible under clear restrictions. Grounded Theory has made it methodologically possible to include very different

resources: Interview partners, fieldnotes, additional material provided by the interviewees, files and published literature.

The study is currently still in progress, which is why only initial results can be published, and these only on a preliminary basis. After completion of the work, the results will be presented in a comprehensive monograph.

Disruption Results in Global Crisis

Disruption triggers

Impact Cloud

Pandemic

**Wars
Global conflicts**

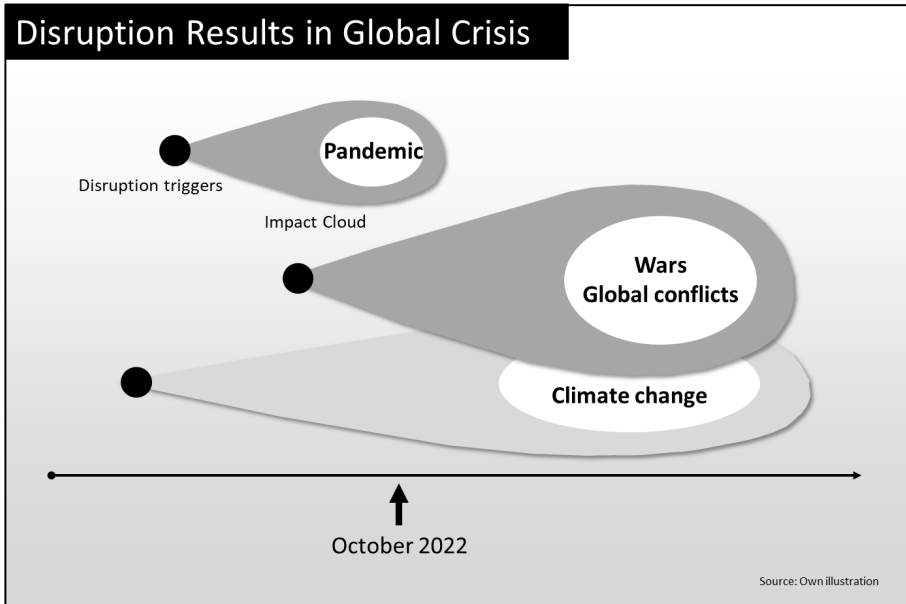**Climate change**

October 2022

Source: Own illustration

Figure 11: Impact of disruptive events

Prior to Covid-19, the external influence on corporate strategy had been easier to observe over the previous three decades. Then, with the onset of the pandemic, sudden events created completely new conditions—often within only a few days—that management found itself unable to deal with. For instance, in the initial weeks of the pandemic, it was necessary to switch to virtual forms of working, such as home office and video conferencing—sometimes within a matter of days—and, in many cases, this worked relatively well. This has, however, made many office spaces redundant—eliminating the spatial separation of living and working for many people. The disruptive events have different dimensions and periods of impact. For companies, this means being prepared for unexpected events in the future by means of prepared scenarios and strategies.

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